



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FAMOUS WORLD LITERATURE



EDITED BY:

RICHARD GARNETT

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FAMOUS WORLD LITERATURE

SELECTIONS FROM THE WORLD'S GREAT WRITERS
ANCIENT, MEDIÆVAL, AND MODERN, WITH BIO-
GRAPHICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

AND
CRITICAL ESSAYS

BY
MANY EMINENT WRITERS.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE

BY PROFESSOR DOWDEN

WHEN we name the Elizabethan period of English literature, our imagination runs forward to include those years of the reign of James I. during which the chief formative influences in literature were derived from the preceding reign. We hardly think at all of those earlier years which preceded the advent of Spenser. We grasp at results, and are unjust and ungrateful to a laborious generation, without whose toil those results could never have been attained. If we view the whole tract of time from the accession of Elizabeth to the death of King James as a single epoch, memorable for the erection of great structures of thought and imagination, having a distinctive style and character of their own, we may divide that epoch into three periods, which I would name the Foundations, the Culmination, and last, the Decline and Dissolution. The Decline came gradually and almost imperceptibly; if we date its commencement from the year in which Shakespeare ceased to write, this is only a date of convenience, not of historical precision. But we are fortunate in being able to say exactly when the Foundations were fully laid. During twenty years faithful workmen were hewing the materials, and making the substructure firm. In 1579 the work rose to view; in that year was published the first part of Lyly's *Euphues*, which presented in a popular form the new ideals of culture, of manners, of education; at the same moment appeared the greatest of English prose translations, North's *Plutarch*, which held up before Elizabethan heroism a model in the heroism of Greece and Rome; and again in that fortunate year

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the future poet of modern chivalry, of English morals, English patriotism, and Italian visions of beauty was discovered in the author of *The Shepherd's Calendar*.

The work of Elizabeth's earlier years consisted chiefly in the reconstruction of order in Church and State. Dangers from France, dangers from Spain, dangers from Scotland were met or were skilfully warded off. By a series of opportune compromises an ecclesiastical settlement was effected, and the Protestantism of the English nation was secured. Social discontents were allayed; commerce and manufacture flourished, and the desire for new and splendid pleasures followed the increase of wealth. Around a great monarchy gathered great courtiers; and as a banner becomes the rallying-point and centre of enthusiasm for an armed host, so Elizabeth, the truest representative of the people, was uplifted by the hearts and imaginations of her subjects into an emblem of the national unity and the national pride.

The literary work of the period, which I name the Foundations, was in the main that of finding and bringing the materials, and of placing them in order. At the same time, workmen were receiving some training in the processes of art, though as yet their efforts were the tentative endeavours of unskilled hands, and they made those false starts which often precede, and often must precede, ultimate success. The materials were in part historical. With the sense that England was a nation, at one with herself, and holding her own among the powers of Europe, came an awakened interest in the story of her past. The printer Grafton, having retired from his labours at the press, redacted, in a business-like manner rather than a scholarly, the chronicles of England. His rival Stow, who held Grafton in scorn, collected documents, transcribed manuscripts, proved his reverence for our elder poetry by an edition of Chaucer, and, pursuing his antiquarian studies with a zeal which poverty could not diminish, compiled the most faithful of sixteenth-century annals. Foxe, in the spirit which the Marian persecutions had inevitably aroused, recorded the sufferings and the heroisms of the martyrs; dedications to Jesus Christ, and to His servant the Queen of England, are prefixed to the first edition

of his *Actes and Monuments*. Holinshed was unawares laying the bases of the chronicle plays of Shakespeare. Already Camden, encouraged by his fellow-student, Philip Sidney, was gathering that body of knowledge which makes his *Britannia* even still a substantial gift to students. Archbishop Parker, the patron of both Stow and Grafton, found time, amid the duties of the primacy, to save from destruction or loss inestimable treasures of the past, scattered from monastic libraries, and to compile a learned folio on English ecclesiastical history and biography. Even poetry looked to English history for its support and sustenance. That large and ever-expanding series of tragic narratives, *A Mirror for Magistrates*, the co-operative labour of a generation, is an encyclopædia of national history in verse. *Gorboduc*, the first regular tragedy, renders into dramatic form matter which, though not authentic history, was a fragment of the legend of ancient Britain.

But the England of Elizabeth, because it was patriotic in the best sense of the word, was also cosmopolitan. It is a timid spirit of nationality which fears to accept the gifts of other lands. The builders brought material from the Greece and Rome of classical antiquity, and from modern Italy, from France, from Spain. Shakespeare as a boy may have read Ovid in the original; he certainly was acquainted with the *Metamorphoses* in Arthur Golding's translation. The first tragedy in which Shakespeare brought terror into alliance with beauty is founded on Arthur Brooke's rehandling of Bandello's story of Romeo and Juliet as given in a French version. Painter's great collection of tales, chiefly from Italian sources, *The Palace of Pleasure*, became a store-house for the use of dramatists in search of plots or incidents. Without the work of the earlier years of Elizabeth's reign, the work of the later and greater years could never have been accomplished. It taught the Elizabethan imagination to explore the past and to fare forth in the modern world on courageous adventure; it created a demand for the colour and warmth and passion of the south; it sent the poets abroad as gallant freebooters to ravage foreign shores and bring home their treasures.

And at the same time there was at least a tuning of the instru-

ments preparatory to the great symphony. It may seem as if little progress in the harmony of verse was made since the publication of Wyatt's and Surrey's poems in *Tottel's Miscellany*; and in truth no poet during the interval between the appearance of that volume and the appearance of *The Shepherd's Calendar* was in a high sense an inventor of harmony. But it was necessary that the old forms should be worn out, and that unsuccessful experiments should be made before such nobler forms as the Spenserian stanza or the blank verse of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* could be created. George Gascoigne never quite succeeded in anything, but he was versatile in experiment, and opened new avenues for his successors. As he rode from Chelmsford to London, he tells us his brain was beating out the lines of an elegy, but "being overtaken with a dash of rain, I struck over into the *De Profundis*." Five sundry gentlemen desired him to write in verse something worthy to be remembered, and forthwith he compiled five sundry sorts of metre, upon five sundry themes which they delivered to him. Mr. Gosse has connected the outbreak of later Elizabethan song with the growing cultivation of music, and especially of music for the lute. Probably both developments of lyrical feeling had a common cause in the coalescing of sentiment or passion with that imagination, now refined and educated, which lives within the cells of hearing; and song lying close to music, each could render appropriate service to the other.

Imagine a young man of genius arriving at a consciousness of his adult powers in the years immediately after this preparatory work had been achieved. He would sail with wind astern and tide in his favour, and he might achieve much. He would have in him the pride of England without the insular narrowness and prejudice. He would be politically a member of a powerful and haughty nation, while intellectually the citizen of a commonwealth no less than European. Living in the present day, quick as it was with life and action, he would be the inheritor of all the past—the past of his own people, the illustrious past of Greece and Rome. The Renaissance would have brought him an enthusiasm for beauty, and a delight in the tragic, pathetic, and mirthful play of human

passion. The Reformation would have brought him seriousness, a veneration for conscience, and a sense of the sacred purpose of life. The one tradition would prepare him to pursue new avenues of the expanding intellect of man; the other tradition would reinforce his feeling for the abiding truths of the spirit. Hebraism and Hellenism might meet in his consciousness, and encounter there without opposition. Arthur Golding, the translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was also the translator of Calvin's *Sermons*, and no one belonging to the middle party of wisdom and moderation would have thought of commenting upon the fact as strange.

It is true that there was a considerable body of Puritan opinion which anticipated the coming danger, and viewed with more than distrust the new unbridled appetite for pleasure. It is true that among the dramatists there was a small party of revolters against the doctrine and even the temper of religion. But the higher mind of England held on the middle way, the way of conciliation. And the greatness of Elizabethan literature is in a large measure to be accounted for by the fact that it expressed no fragment of the life and mind of the time, but all the powers of our manhood—the senses, the passions, the intellect, the conscience, the will—co-operating one with another in a harmonious whole. In the period of the Restoration the higher mind of England was directed towards the discoveries of science; the literature of pleasure was dominated by the senses, and wit did brilliant things, but in the service of the senses; pseudo-heroics and overstrained gallantry and honour were poor substitutes for the modesty of right feeling. In the age of Queen Anne, literature was dominated by the understanding; after the violences of the two extreme parties of the nation a reconstruction had been effected, but it was a provisional reconstruction, the result of compromises and good sense, admirable for the uses of the time, but resting on a lower level than that attained in the heroic years which brought the reign of Elizabeth to its close. During the Middle Ages the natural and the supernatural were too often broadly severed, and each made reprisals upon the other; the spirit warred against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit; some gross *fabliau*, where a priest or monk

beguiles a dotard husband, jostles an ascetic treatise, or the life of a saint decked out with the tinsel of puerile miracles. In the highest examples of Elizabethan literature the senses claim their rights; the *Faerie Queene* is a perpetual feast for the imaginative eye and ear; the uses of the senses are honoured, and their abuses are condemned. The supernatural is found to dwell within the natural; the true miracle is the passion of love in a Cordelia or the malignant craft of an Iago. Genuine heroisms are conceivable, and pseudo-heroics replace these only in the Elizabethan decline. Imaginative reason utters its oracles, which are not at variance with the words of mundane good sense; Shakespeare's Prospero does not discredit for us the prudential wisdom of Shakespeare's Ulysses. The ideal is not, as was that of the age of Swift and Pope and Addison, an ideal of moderation, balance, discretion, but an ideal of humanity developed to the full, attaining its highest points of vision, its highest reaches of passion, and including among its results the intellectual conquest of nature for the service of man.

Was it possible to unite the two streams of tendency, that derived from the Renaissance and that derived from the Reformation? Was not the central idea of the one movement antagonistic to the central idea of the other? Did not the Renaissance proclaim the excellence of the natural man, while the Reformation preached human depravity, and the need of a renewal of man's nature by divine grace? The answer to these questions may partly be found in the facts of history; for one brief period at least, the two streams ran together and made a single current swift and full. A reconciliation of the rival tendencies was attained in Elizabethan literature; afterwards, for a time the streams parted; the tradition of the Reformation, developing to further reforms, belonged in the main to the Puritan party; the tradition of the Renaissance, dwindling from its earlier and higher meanings, belonged in the main to the Cavaliers. Yet such writers as Jeremy Taylor and Donne and Herbert, show that in the Royalist party the serious temper of the religious reform could co-exist with all the learning, the eloquence, the refinement of Renaissance

culture. And, on the other hand, it is a remarkable fact that no loftier conception of a harmonious co-operation of the spirit of religion with the passion for self-development—self-development with a view to public duties—is anywhere to be found than in the writings of the Puritan Milton. Man, he tells us, is fallen; but man was created in the image of God; and it is not by some sudden ingress of divine grace that God's image can now be fully renewed and restored; every art and every science is needed to accomplish that work. Every energy of the intellect, every natural delight of the body, Milton tells us, is pure and sacred. Evil has entered into the world; but virtue is *not to be attained* by flying from evil into cloistered innocence; let good and evil meet in vigorous conflict; let truth and falsehood grapple. And it was the Puritan Milton who set forth a magnificent conception of the pleasures of England as organised, subsidised, and wisely controlled by an enlightened national government. It is false to assert that a reconciliation between the Renaissance and the Reformation was impossible; it is unquestionably true that the danger of a breach, caused by the extreme parties on either side, was great.

We must remember that the Renaissance influence found entrance into England, not through a literature of licentious pleasure, but in the serious form of the New Learning. Erasmus was erudite, witty, satirical; More was full of a gracious humour, a lover of domestic joys, a lover of all innocent mirth. But these representatives of the early Renaissance in England, and their fellows, were men of serious lives, who aimed at serious ends; they were, indeed, or they strove to be, reformers, reformers in matters social, in morals, in education, and even to some extent in politics. The tradition of the New Learning, its grave temper, its earnest purpose were not wholly lost in the days of Elizabeth; the Renaissance had still with some men an ethical side, and it was felt that a noble humanism included a regard for what is highest in character. On the other hand, the Reformed Church of England had its mundane side; the Queen was vice-gerent of the head of the Church; the bishops held their seats in the great council of the nation; the ecclesiastical ritual was not wanting in an ordered

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beauty appealing to the senses or to the "spirit in sense"; a priest might be a husband and the father of a family. The conditions, on the whole, were favourable to the formation of a middle party, serious, and sincerely attached to the reformed faith, and at the same time not averse to learning and culture, not averse to the honest joys of life. The Reformation to some extent was, like the Renaissance, an enfranchisement of reason, an enfranchisement of humanity; and by its appeal to Scripture, and to private judgment, it assuredly quickened the intellect as well as the conscience of men. The Queen, essentially a woman of the Renaissance in her craft, her passions, her versatility, her love of pomp and splendour, was loyal, for political reasons, if for no other, to the teaching of the Reformation; below her sensuality, her fits of temper, her shifting moods, she was eminently rational; she felt deeply the importance of maintaining the unity of the nation's life, and had a genuine hatred of the madness of extremes. And Puritanism as yet was chiefly concerned with details of ceremony; the more deep-seated theological controversies between Arminian high-churchman and Calvinistic Puritan waited for the reign of King James; the alliance of political passions with Puritanism waited for the reign of Charles.

Thus broad-based, Elizabethan literature, in its best and most characteristic work, was naturally broad-minded. The pupil of its great masters will come to think of literature as concerned with life, and with life as a whole. The work of those masters has neither the narrowness of the ascetic, nor the narrowness of the voluptuary. There is a beautiful idealism in art, which ignores the presence of evil in the world, and dreams such celestial dreams as Fra Angelico made radiant in colour. We shall not find such idealism in Shakespeare or even in Spenser. They have their feet planted on the earth, and Elizabethan England was very far removed from the Paradise of the mediæval painter. But it was equally far removed from the world of sots and gallants, and the women who know how to court their own pursuit by rake or gallant, in Restoration comedy.

The great effort of the time may be described as an attempt to

make a conquest of the world of nature and the world of humanity for the service of man. Such an attempt might be essentially Pagan, if "man" and "the service of man" were conceived in the way of the Renaissance, as narrowed in its meanings by the spokesmen of what we may term the extreme left. But to place our great writers in separate groups, as Taine has done in his *History of English Literature*, with the titles "The Pagan Renaissance," and "The Christian Renaissance," and to include under the former Sidney and Spenser and Bacon, is to present a wholly erroneous view of Elizabethan literature. The service of man was understood by these great writers as the service of our complete manhood; humanism was seen to be not merely sensual or material, not merely intellectual and imaginative, but also ethical and religious. And although questions of religion, considered apart from character and action, do not form part of the theme of dramatic poetry, there can be no doubt that the foundations of Shakespeare's tragedies were laid deep in the spiritual nature of man as they could not have been in an age which thought only, or which thought chiefly, of the sensual or material parts of life. On the other hand, no such treatise on theological and ecclesiastical affairs as Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, so broad-based on reason and historical tradition, so comprehensive in its habit of thought, so majestic in its way of utterance, could have been written in an age which exalted faith at the expense of reason, which opposed the supernatural to the natural, which divorced the life of the Church from the life of the nation, or which was insensible to the beauty and dignity of literary form.

Lyly's *Euphues*, in its poor way, amid much dreary moralising, and under the trappings of a detestably artificial style, held up the new ideal of manhood. To be well-born, well-bred, beautiful in person, accomplished in all the graces of life, courtly, amorous, a student of philosophy and a lover of fair women, versed in Italian culture, yet one who honoured English morals and manners, a patriot serious and religious, a devout servant of the English Queen—such was the ideal. And not only young gentlemen, but young ladies for a few years found in *Euphues* a manual of good

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breeding. If that ideal were incarnated in flesh and blood, we can imagine how such a veritable Euphues would be cherished and exalted in the imagination of his contemporaries, and if he were withdrawn from their observation by an early and heroic death, how a legend of admiration and love and modern chivalry would gather around his memory. And this was in fact what happened. To the Elizabethan imagination, Philip Sidney was what Arthur Hallam was to the imagination of Tennyson—the “Hesper-Phosphor” of the time, recalling what was most beautiful in the past and prophetic of the newer day. The legend of Sidney, indeed, was not far removed from the actual fact. His peculiar fascination lay in brilliance standing forth from a background of seriousness. His ardour and impetuosity sprang from a nobility of nature; his passion was controlled and was directed by conscience; his wide and various culture seemed to be only the flowering of a beautiful character. Even in boyhood he was noted for a “lovely and familiar gravity”; in youth he already showed some of the sagacity of a statesman, and all the courage of an English patriot. He was a champion of the Protestant cause; in sympathy with the French Huguenots, the unswerving foe of Spain and of Rome, the friend of the learned controversialist Languet, the translator of Duplessis Mornay’s treatise on the Christian religion. Yet Sidney was at the same time a true child of the Renaissance, skilled in every accomplishment, a brilliant figure at the tournament, a student of music, of poetry, of astronomy, a lover of Spanish and Italian letters, an experimenter in classical metres, the defender of the drama against Puritan scruples, author of a masque, of amorous sonnets, of a pastoral-chivalric romance, the acquaintance of Tintoretto and of Paolo Veronese, the patron of Giordano Bruno, the aider of those bold explorers and adventurers who would for England make conquest of the globe, an enthusiastic sympathiser with Drake and Frobisher, with Raleigh and Sir Humphrey Gilbert; withal, Sidney was famous for a tragic passion of love and famous for inviolable friendships. The light work upon a sad or solemn ground, which Bacon commends in embroideries, appears even in the close of his life. The noble act of generosity to a

wounded fellow-soldier on the battlefield is not the latest incident. As he lay dying, Sidney attended devoutly to the ministrations of religion, but he also had spirit to compose his poem—can we doubt that it was playfully pathetic?—*La Cuisse rompue*, which, being arranged to music, was sung beside his bed. No wonder that the public sorrow called forth by his early death was like that for a great national calamity. All that was best and most characteristic of the age had been embodied in him; the Pagan Renaissance, as it is named by Taine, and the Christian Renaissance, had been united in the spirit of this young man; what is national and what is cosmopolitan had in his genius been fused into one.

The ideal which had been more nearly realised in Sidney than in any of his contemporaries forms the subject of the master-work of Sidney's friend and fellow-poet, who had dedicated to him, as the "president of chivalry," that volume of verse, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, which heralded the greater years of Elizabethan literature. *The Faerie Queene* was designed to set forth Spenser's conception of a gentleman or noble person, and such an one as he had actually found in Sidney. Upon a first view the poem seems a labyrinth of flowery glades, through which for mere delight the imagination may wander without end or aim; but Spenser had planned it with a purpose, and that purpose had the high seriousness of the time. He would exhibit all the chief elements which go to form a heroic character, all the chief dangers to which such a character is exposed in the warfare of this world, and would incite men towards the attainment of that magnanimity, or, as he terms it, "magnificence," which sums up all the virtues of our fully developed manhood. Poetry, as Sidney had conceived it, is to be like a trumpet-call summoning men to action, and, as Sidney had conceived, history on the one hand and moral philosophy on the other, are to be the auxiliaries and subordinate allies of poetry. Such was Spenser's design. He thinks of life as a warfare against the principalities and powers of evil; he represents godliness, self-control, and chastity as the foundation virtues on which a complete and beautiful humanity is to be erected; he is at once a son of the Renaissance and a son of the Reformation; a cosmopolitan in his

culture, and a patriot in his passion; enamoured of all beauty appealing to the sense and to the spirit, yet no wanton lover of sensual delights; rather, indeed, with a certain sternness at his heart, honouring, as much as any Puritan, the girt loins and the lit lamp. Ariosto and Tasso, Aristotle and Plato, St. Paul and the writer of the Apocalypse, alike contribute to the structure or the adornment of *The Faerie Queene*.

When some former pupils of Hooker on one occasion visited their master, they found him in the fields, tending his sheep, with a book in his hand; it was no treatise on theology which he had brought with him as the solace of his retirement; it was the Odes of Horace. He, too, the chief spokesman of the Anglican Church in Elizabethan days, possessed that breadth of mind and that feeling for beauty united with seriousness, which were characteristic of a time when the two great streams of tendency, Renaissance and Reformation, made a single current deep and full. He would give its due place of authority to Scripture, to tradition, to the voice of wisdom and of learning, but in the last resort the basis of belief must be found in the reason of man. He honours all that is venerable in the past; he recognises the service which the senses can render to the soul; order and beauty in the rites and ceremonies of religion are precious to him; he is a liberal conservative in ecclesiastical affairs, having the same temper of mind which Edmund Burke two centuries later applied to politics. He acknowledges the due power of authority; yet the authority, he tells us, not of four, but of ten thousand, General Councils cannot overthrow or resist one plain demonstration: "Companies of men, be they never so great and reverend, are to yield unto reason, the weight whereof is no whit prejudiced by the simplicity of the person which doth allege it." Hooker's dominant idea is that set forth with a majestic sweep of thought and a grave harmony of utterance in the first book of the *Ecclesiastical Polity*—the idea of the whole universe as a cosmos under the reign of law; and such an idea is in no ill-keeping with a period which mirrored the moral world of man in Shakespeare's plays, and attempted a method of exploring the laws of the material universe in Bacon's *Novum Organum*.

How and why did the decline and dissolution creep on, and transform the literature of the great years of Elizabeth's reign to the literature of the succeeding generation? The answer is too large to be set down here; it is partly to be discovered in the record of political history. King James I. was learned and acute in logical distinctions; he had not the wisdom or the tact of Elizabeth. Buckingham was a mean successor to the great councillors of the preceding reign. The Hampton Court conference, and the outbreaks of the King's intolerant temper, struck an opening note of discord. The Commons and the King were soon at war about the new impositions. The foreign policy of James became hopelessly discredited. The lowered tone of court morals is reflected in the drama of Fletcher. An open breach between the two camps of the nation was already threatening. The more serious part of the mind of England withdrew from the more pleasure-loving part. Liberty, political and ecclesiastical, became a more urgent need than the liberation of the mind through humanism. The two streams of tendency which had flowed into one in the literature of Elizabeth, now flowed, not wholly, indeed, but in great measure, in separate channels. For the ultimate ends of humanism political freedom and religious toleration were necessary; but during the clatter of pamphlets and the clash of swords humanism must bide its time. It was not until the great scientific movement of post-Restoration days that the Renaissance resumed its course, and that the serious temper of Puritanism—the temper of the loins girt and the lamp lit—applied itself to noble intellectual purposes, which were other than those dictated by the immediate public needs of the nation. In Newton, in Locke, in the liberal spirit of Tillotson, we see the recovery of lost things; but the large wisdom and deep imaginative insight of Elizabethan literature were not wholly recovered. Enthusiasm had been discredited, and it needed a century, with a methodist revival and a French Revolution, to restore it to its rights.

Edward Dowden.

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